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ABSTRACT

A project proposed to demonstrate an effective delivery system for providing family literacy services to homeless parents of young children by taking the "Read Me a Story" program directly into bridge housing sites where the families resided. The approach offered was the direct parent/indirect child model. The curriculum came from adaptations of others' work as well as instructor-developed activities to reinforce the lessons. The target audience was parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who were residing in four bridge housing facilities located in the Greater Pittsburgh area; all participants were women. Child care was provided. The program was evaluated on a weekly basis and at the end of the six-session workshop by the instructor to determine if the content was appropriate for and acceptable to the women at the bridge housing programs. The bridge housing program staff evaluated the effectiveness upon the conclusion of the workshop sessions. Participants also evaluated the workshops at the last session by writing about their feelings about the workshop and how reading aloud had improved or changed their relationship with their children. The workshops provided useful knowledge, books, and materials for the women to spend time reading with their children. Bridge housing staff stated that the program improved the relationships between the women and their children. (Evaluations are appended.) (Author/YLB)

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ED 376 338

FAMILY LITERACY IN BRIDGE HOUSING

Judith Aaronson, Project Director
Shelli Glanz, Project Supervisor
Chris A. Hoke, Project Instructor

Goodwill Literacy Initiative

1993-1994

Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh
2600 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203
(412) 481-9005

$6,204

98-4059

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Abstract

Title: Family Literacy in Bridge Housing

Project Number: 984059 **Funding:** $6,204

Director/Contact: Judith Aaronson **Phone:** (412) 481-9005

Address: Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh/ Goodwill Literacy Initiative (GLI)
2600 East Carson Street, 6th. floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Purpose:

The primary purpose for this project was to increase the amount of time that homeless parents residing in bridge housing facilities spent in independent literacy activities with their children. The specific activity targeted was reading aloud to the children.

Procedures:

Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh/ GLI proposed to demonstrate an effective delivery system for providing family literacy services to homeless parents of young children by taking the "Read Me a Story" program directly into bridge housing sites where the families reside. This eliminated institutional and situational barriers to participation. The approach offered was the direct parent/ indirect child model. The curriculum came from adaptations of other's work, as well as instructor developed activities to reinforce the lessons.

The target audience for this program was parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who were residing in any of four bridge housing facilities located in the Greater Pittsburgh area. Due to the populations served by these agencies, all participants were women. Child care was provided while the parents were participating in the workshops.

The program was evaluated on a weekly basis and at the end of the six session workshop by the instructor to determine if the content was appropriate for and acceptable to the women at the bridge housing programs. The bridge housing program staff evaluated the effectiveness of the workshop by writing a one page letter to the project supervisor upon the conclusion of the workshop sessions. Participants also evaluated the workshop sessions at the last session in writing concerning their feelings about the workshop and how reading aloud has improved or changed their relationships with their children.

Bridge Housing staff participated in a two session training workshop at the conclusion of the program year so that they could conduct the Read Me a Story workshop at their sites when federal funds ended.

Findings/ Comments:

Women in bridge housing programs typically do not spend enough quality time with their young children. The "Read Me a Story" workshops provided useful knowledge, books and materials for these women to spend some quality time reading with their children. The bridge housing staff also stated that the program improved the relationships between the women and their children.

FAMILY LITERACY IN BRIDGE HOUSING

Introduction

This program was developed to demonstrate an effective delivery system for providing family-oriented literacy services to homeless parents of young children. By taking the "Read Me a Story" program directly into bridge or transitional housing sites where the families reside, Goodwill Literacy Initiative of Goodwill Industries (GLI-GWI) believed that the result would be an increase in the amount of time that the parents spent reading to their children. When parents actively read aloud to children, literacy levels of both parent and child can improve. Children who are read to at home on a regular basis are better prepared for school learning than those children who are not read to by family or caregivers. (Anderson, Hiebert, et.al., 1985)

GLI- GWI successfully developed and implemented a four session workshop series for the Allegheny County Head Start program during the 1991-92 program year entitled, "Read Me a Story." The workshop was expanded to six sessions and tailored for the parents in the bridge housing programs using Federal Special Demonstration Project grant funds during the 1992-93 program year. Each session focused on a different type of children's book and exposed parents to a variety of ways to use the books with their children including asking questions while reading and making predictions. Parents were also taught craft activities to extend the ideas in the stories such as making concept books to use with their children outside of the workshop setting. Many of the ideas for this workshop were adapted from the New Reader's Press program entitled, Family Reading, and from Literacy Volunteers of America's, Reading With Children. Federal funds were provided to continue and improve the project during the 1993-94 program year.

The 1992-93 "Read Me a Story" program which provided family literacy instruction to homeless mothers at bridge housing sites was very effective in the opinion of the participants and staff involved. Based on the program evaluations from the 1992-93 program, the 1993-94 program included the following changes:

- a visit to the local public library
- evaluation of weekly reading activities with families were done through oral communication with the group, instead of recording activities
- a training workshop for bridge housing staff to facilitate the "Read Me a Story" workshops

Staff who worked on this project included: Shelli Glanz, who developed the original " Read Me a Story" workshop and supervised the project, and Chris A. Hoke, who adapted and taught the workshops for the Bridge Housing programs. This project can be easily replicated for programs dealing with families in sheltered environments. A variety of books can be used if the recommended materials are not available. The important aspects of the workshop were emphasis on reading aloud to children and discussion of issues brought out in the books as they related to the participants' lives.

Copies of this report are available through:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education
AdvancE Office
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
800-992-2283

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to a study conducted by the New York Family Services Project of Bank Street College (1991), homeless women are significantly less likely than poor but housed women to have attained a high school diploma or GED. Data collected by Molnar, Rath, and Klein (1990) indicate that homeless children exhibit developmental problems more often than poor but housed children and far more often than the general population. Bassuk et al (1986, 1987, 1988) found that 47-54 % of homeless preschoolers screened in her study displayed at least one serious impairment in language, social skills, or motor development.

It is obvious that the problems faced by homeless families are complex and that an interdisciplinary approach to serving them is necessary. Homeless parents are often poorly educated and may display a dysfunctional relationship with their children, making shared reading experiences unlikely. These parents, while dealing with a multitude of serious problems on a daily basis, may not recognize their role as the first and most important teacher of their young children. If parents accept this important role by learning how to read to them effectively, they will improve their own skills interrupting the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy in families. The "Read Me a Story" workshop introduces parents to a variety of childrens' books and activities that will provide them with a reason to interact with their children in a positive way for a few minutes each day. It is hoped that these activities will lead to a more functional relationship between the parents and children.

PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the Family Literacy in Bridge Housing project was to increase the amount of time that parents in bridge housing spent reading to their children on a permanent basis. To reach this goal parents at four bridge housing programs in Allegheny County were recruited for a seven week "Read Me a Story" workshop to be presented at their residences.(one week's session was a library trip)

The objectives of the seven week workshops were:

(1) To introduce bridge housing homeless mothers to the importance of reading aloud to children through modeling techniques of interactive reading using a variety of quality children's books.

(2) To introduce the four areas of the language arts (listening, speaking, writing and reading) and to teach parents to use them during the workshop sessions and to encourage use of language activities when interacting with their children in daily life at home, on walks, at the grocery store, etc.

(3) To demonstrate to the mothers how to use the public library to choose age appropriate books for children based on the children's interests. Mothers will acquire a library card and meet personally with the a children's librarian during one of the workshop sessions.

(4) To increase interactive time between mothers and children using reading related activities such as using photos to help tell a story, creating home made concept (ABC, counting, color, etc.) and family story books, creating stories using wordless cartoons, and writing haiku poems.

(5) To expand the mothers' reading interests by reading and discussing a variety of adult oriented readings excerpted from fiction and non-fiction.

(6) To modify the evaluation plan from the 1992-1993 proposal to include weekly oral evaluations instead of written.

(7) To implement the modified plan by implementing the program this year in the four bridge housing sites.

(8) To facilitate continuation of the project by conducting a two session training course for representatives (staff and volunteers) from each of the four sites in methods of delivering the "Read Me a Story" program.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project was designed to remove institutional barriers to participation by providing on-site services to parents and children in bridge housing facilities. A variation of the direct parent/ indirect child model was utilized in the "Read Me a Story" workshops at these programs. Mothers received instruction on how to use children's books effectively with their families in an informal workshop setting, while their children were cared for in a separate area of the facility. Participants received their own copies of the children's books and many handouts at each session.

Phase 1: Planning (July - September 1993)

The four bridge housing programs with which Goodwill Literacy Initiative worked during the 1992-93 program year were contacted to set up dates for the 1993-94 year. These sites were: the YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh (Wilkinsburg), Debra House (Braddock, PA), Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, and Sojourner House, a bridge housing program for former substance abusers in the Garfield section of Pittsburgh.

Chris Hoke was hired as the bridge housing family literacy instructor for the 1993-94 program year.

Phase 2: Coordination (September 1993- May 1994)

The instructor met with the bridge housing staffs before each workshop to describe the format and content of the **seven** session "Read Me a Story" workshop. During these meetings, the instructor also became familiar the expectations and needs of the clients in residing in the programs sites. Workshops were scheduled for each program one evening per week for **two hours** during the time when required family education groups were scheduled for residents. It was also decided that bridge housing staff would recruit child care workers from their part time staff who were already familiar with the program and the families.

Phase 3: Conducting the Workshops (October 1993 - April 1994)

Beginning in October, 1993 the family literacy instructor met with the participants.

The workshops were held in the following order:

Sojourner House, Pittsburgh, PA	Oct. - Dec. 1993
Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh	Jan. - Mar. 1994
Debra House, Braddock, PA	Jan. - Mar. 1994
YWCA Bridge Housing, Wilkinsburg, PA	Mar. - Apr. 1994

Workshop Content:

Session 1 -- The Power of Reading and Storytelling

Children's Book:	Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak
Adult Selection:	passage from Black Boy by Richard Wright
Reading Strategy:	Asking questions
Activity:	Language experience stories

Session 2 ---Wordless Picture Books

Children's Book: The Snowman by Raymond Briggs

Adult Selection: Adult oriented wordless cartoon

Reading Strategy: Creating a story

Activity: Tape recording stories

Session 3 --- Concept Books (ABC, Counting, Colors, etc.)

Children's Book: A to Z by Sandra Boynton

Reading Strategy: Observing and developing vocabulary

Activity: Making a simple concept book

Session 4 --- Family Stories (oral and written)

Children's Book: A Chair for My Mother by Vera Williams

Adult Selection: passage from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

Reading Strategy: Asking quesions and making predictions

Activity: Creating a personal family history and family tree

Session 5 --- Folktales and Fables

Children's Book: The Little Red Hen by Paul Galdone

Fable by A. Lobel: "The Mouse at the Seashore" from Fables

Reading Strategy: Making predictions

Activity: Making stick or bag puppets

Session 6 --- Poetry

Children's Book: Surprises by L. B. Hopkins, ed.

Adult Selections: Assortment of poems by M. Angelou, L. Hughes, and other contemporary poets.

Reading Strategy: Rereading

Activity: Writing haiku poetry

Phase 4: Conducting the Training workshop for bridge housing staffs (June 1994)

Phase 5: Evaluation and Writing the Final Report (June 1994)

RESULTS

Objectives 1 and 2

Each workshop session emphasized a particular theme. The workshop instructor used a quality children's book as the centerpiece of each session. To learn how to teach their children to be active listeners and readers, the participants observed the instructor modeling the use of pre- reading strategies such as previewing the book by looking at the cover and title, and active reading strategies such as asking questions, making predictions, creating stories, building vocabulary, and rereading while reading the book aloud. Participants also practiced the strategies with each other in the workshop session before using them privately with their children. These books also provided topics of discussion relating to real life issues such as saving money, working together for a common cause, survival after a fire, etc. Many participants in this population had difficulty opening up about some topics, while others used the workshop session to talk about something that they might have been holding inside until an incident in one of the readings allowed them to speak about it. While reading A Chair for my Mother, participants discussed many families issues including abuse.

Whole language techniques played a major role in this project. Participants were encouraged to write questions, or predictions while reading the children's books at the sessions. They were encouraged to write poetry and to create their own family stories.

Objective 3

Most participants and their children attended the library session. Those who attended obtained cards for themselves and their children. The librarian gave them a tour of the children's section and entertained the group with storytelling . Refreshments and gifts were provided by the instructor. For many of them, this was their first visit to the local library. Prior to the visit all were given information about adult and children's activities at their local public libraries and encouraged to sign up for cards and to attend story hours when possible with their children. A variety of book lists were distributed recommending age appropriate books available at the public library.

Objective 4

To emphasize the fun of reading together, participants were introduced to a variety of crafts to use with their children either before reading a book or as an enrichment activity after reading a book. (See workshop content outline)

Objective 5

All sessions provided the participants with the opportunity to read an excerpt from adult fiction or non-fiction related to the weekly theme to enhance their own reading interests. Most of these readings included multi-cultural authors.

An informal instructional approach worked best with these groups allowing time for discussion of issues that participants brought up during the course of the workshop session. A sense of humor and openness was also a necessary trait for the instructor. A traditional classroom approach would have been viewed negatively by most of the participants. It is also important to be aware that not all participants can or want to read aloud in the group setting. To avoid embarrassment, the workshop instructor should always ask for volunteers to read aloud instead of calling directly

on participants. The teacher must also allow participants to express opinions so that they feel confident and comfortable in the workshop.

Objective 6

Oral evaluations were done weekly through discussion at the beginning of each session. Students were given the opportunity to share their experience of reading aloud to their children during the week and to ask questions and give other feedback. At the end of the program, they were given a one page questionnaire which they could use to express their opinions about the effectiveness of the program. They also had the option to write a paragraph to express their views. Some examples of their evaluations are found in the Appendix.

Objective 7

The updated program was implemented and well received at the four sites. A total number of **51** women benefitted as a result of their participation in this project with **106** children benefitting indirectly. The participants' average age was **28** years. The average grade completed in school for the participants was **eleventh**.

Information concerning community adult education programs was made available to the workshop participants and staff of the bridge housing programs at the conclusion of the workshops.

Objective 8

The training session was divided into two (2) four hour sessions held on two different days a week apart. Due to the overloaded schedules of the shelter staff, it was difficult to get 100 % attendance. However, those who did attend felt the training was valuable and gave them a better perspective on the importance of reading aloud to children and how to incorporate this into the shelter's life skills classes.

EVALUATION

The project goal and objectives were evaluated weekly as well as after each of the four workshops was completed. The instructor allowed time at the beginning of each session to review what the students had read during the week. Feedback was given as to how the children reacted to the reading ; what part of the book they liked; their attention span and interest, etc. Also, questions from the mothers were answered concerning their reading aloud skills. By the end of the six sessions, participants were more open and trusting toward the instructor and were comfortable enough to write about what they liked and disliked about the workshop. At some sites a one page evaluation form was provided, but the women were encouraged to write their own paragraphs. All participants valued receiving the books to keep as their own. Most of them enjoyed the ideas and craft activities and concept books to use during quality time with their children. (see appendix)

Bridge housing staff were asked to evaluate the impact of the sessions on the residents who participated in the "Read Me a Story" workshops by informal discussions and observations of the reading and reading related behaviors among the families on a daily basis. The written evaluations were submitted to GLI at the completion of each workshop. (see appendix)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From observation and verbal and written comments from the participants and bridge housing staff, this reading program is successful and needs to be continued again at these same sites with the new residents and expanded to more transitional housing sites.

During the seven week session the women became more aware, some for the first time, of the importance of reading aloud to their children and the positive interaction around the reading activites. By taking an interest in reading themselves, they become role models for their children.

The sessions provided opportunity for the women to get to know each other and to learn from one another. The books presented topics which stimulated more discussion about related personal and family experiences. The sessions also created a safe, supportive environment where the women could express their opinions and experiment with their own creative skills in writing and with artwork. One successful project was writing hiaku poems. The class first collaborated on one poem, then did their individual expressions. Many were pleasantly surprized and proud of their results.

Having a "graduation ceremony" with cake and certificates was very important to the participants. The certificate gave them a tangible reward for their attendance and participation; the ceremony gave them a sense of self worth.

The program not only offered the participants important parenting skills, but also a time for fun and laughter in their stressed and unhappy lives. If facilitated by a non-judgmental person, sensitve to their needs, the workshop provides a chance to improve the participant's sense of worth and power.

Tape recording stories for their children worked well with other populations but not with the bridge housing group. Because all of the participants had to share one tape recorder purchased for the site, not everyone got a chance to utilize it while the workshop was being held. It was recommended that they try the activity after the" Read Me a Story" sessions were concluded.

Long term evaluation or follow-up studies of this program are difficult to obtain due to the privacy of the women when they leave the shelter and move into their own residence. It is hoped the women will take the books and reading material with them and apply these reading skills once their lives are more stable. The seed was planted and it can only be hoped that positive long term interaction between the mothers and their children will flourish and the children will see reading as fun and an important part of their lives.

Recommendations:

1. The instructor should meet with the women at the site prior to the first session to explain the program (instead of leaving it up to a staff person) showing the books and samples of crafts and written projects.
2. Attendance at the first class should be made mandatory by the shelter staff.
3. More sessions should be added to the workshop. Many of the participants asked for more sessions during the evaluations.

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APPENDIX

I. Poetry samples

II. Participant evaluations

II. Bridge Housing staff evaluations

Overwhelmed

There I am
closed up
Overpowered
with life's mishaps
Struggling
to make
Life
work
Dealing with everyday
Today
is
Challenging
More now
then
ever before.

Are you playing with angels
My infant daughter
As you sleep?

To whom are you smiling?
Your timy eyelids quiver while shut
Your long lashes
Brush against your face.
Your lips shaped like a
Bow drawn into a smile.

It must be the angels
Bending so near.
They miss you in Heaven,
Since God sent you here.

But since you are tiny
And newborn,
They come in your dreams
And dance until morn.

The Power of a Man

Persuasive this man
Rugged and so controlling
Yet compassionate.

Flattery

Dazzle my ego
I'll flout gracefully in air
Sweep me off my feet

Cross my quietness
Force my laughter if you dare
Pinch me! I'm all there!

Daydreams

What would it be like
To be careless, happy, free
I sit and wonder.

My Disease

My disease is tricky
It lies and says "just one more"
My Pain tells me "No"
It's here to kill and destroy.

Comments from the Women about Read Me A Story

Gave me ideas on things to do and material to read to my child.

It showed me that I could make my own teaching books for my child.

I started reading to my children for the first time and it made me and them feel good.

It taught me patience.

My child is an infant. I usually have to allow her to taste the books before I can begin reading them.

They want to tell me the story their way and what is on the page.

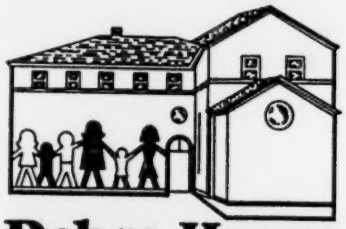
My favorite time was when we made books for our children.

Reading is relaxing. Everytime I read to him he falls asleep.

I felt like I was doing something good. She felt good before she went to sleep after I read to her.

Gives other ways in making reading fun and interactive.

Gave me ideas on things to do and material to read to my child.



Debra House

16 Holland Avenue • Braddock, PA 15104 • (412) 271-5787

Providing housing, counseling and supportive services to women and children.

March 30 , 1994

Shelli Glanz
c/o Goodwill Literacy Initiative
2600 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Dear Ms. Glanz:

On behalf of the staff and women of the Debra House Bridge Housing Program I wish to extend to you our appreciation for the time Chris spent at the Debra House.

The women felt that the program was informative and at the same time something a little different. Chris was warm and sensitive to the needs and concerns of the women, which was further exemplified during a crisis situation at the Debra House. Her time given to the women during the crisis will not be forgotten.

As the counselor of Debra House, I thank you again and feel that I too have gained having worked with Chris.

Sincerely,

Sara Adams
Counselor

SA/tlw

cc: Judith Aaronson, Director

YWCA
Greater Pittsburgh

May 17, 1994

Bridge Housing
P.O. Box 8645
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15221
412-371-2723

Shelli Glanz
Goodwill Literacy Initiative
2600 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Dear Ms. Glanz:

I am writing to let you know how much the women here at Bridge Housing enjoyed the "Read -to Me" program presented by Chris Hoke. I was in our playroom during the groups for the most part but would like to give a few pieces of feedback. I am also enclosing the feedback forms the women completed and would like to ask you to share these with Chris.

You may note from the women's feedback(sorry about the forms being so dark) that they really enjoyed the classes. It was hard to motivate people to come at first but once they did, they both enjoyed themselves and learned. We talk to the residents often about the importance of a bedtime routine and the role reading times play in that routine so I have peace of mind that Chris's classes, combined with the messages from our program staff, result in a lasting impact in the families lives.

The most notable pieces of feedback I personnally got were as follows:
1) The poetry class was thouroughly enjoyed. Chris's extra effort to type it up on her computer as a way of honoring people's creations were appreciated.
2) Giving people books to read to their kids was helpful.
3) Requesting photo's and starting the class with permission slips to do so felt invasive . I don't think anyone liked that sort of start though once they saw the pictures they felt better about it.

Please let Chris know that the women thought her style of presentation was relaxed and interesting. I applaude all her hard work.

Sincerely,

Dana Elmendorf

Dana Elmendorf

Our Imperative:
To Eliminate Racism

A United Way Agency

Women's Center & Shelter
Of Greater Pittsburgh
P.O. Box 9024, Pittsburgh, PA 15224
412 687-8005 - Hotline
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412 687-3315 - FAX

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[illegible]onald Wolff, Jr.

Martha A. Friday
[illegible]ecutive Director

August 10, 1994

Shellie Glanz,

The Read Me A Story Program, this year, was particularly helpful in providing additional resource information for the Mother's Support Group. The program helped to create a new atmosphere of commitment to reading. It encouraged mothers to read to their children as a means of spending quality time with them.

According to the group of mothers who received the sessions, they were impressed with the books they received. The books were free, colorful and easy to read. Although the reading out loud was voluntary, the mothers were involved and seemed to have fun as they learned.

I enjoyed working with Chris Hoke because she was warm and sensitive to the needs of the group. Occasionally, problems related to shelter arose, Chris would gently and respectfully allow the staff facilitators direct the session. This was very helpful.

Children become more independent as they begin using language to share their feelings and thoughts. The Read Me A Story Program gives mothers an opportunity to read and communicate with their children. Women's Center and Shelter is extremely pleased to have a program of the nature in our shelter.

Sincerely,

Maxine Carpenter

Maxine Carpenter
Child Advocate

CW/mc

[illegible]. a United
[illegible]y Member
Agency

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

SOJOURNER HOUSE, INC.
460 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
(412) 441-7783

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Pardee
na Smallwood
J Williams
Lorraine Williams

August 11, 1994

Shelley Glanz
Goodwill Industries
Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative
2600 East Carson
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Dear Shelley,

We would like to take the time to support and thank you for choosing Sojourner House to be a part of your Read-Me-A-Story Project.

The staff of Sojourner House found that your program was very interesting and helpful to most mothers. At first mothers were very reluctant to go to the program because it was mandatory for all women. Some moms complained because they felt that they already knew how to read to their children. It was discovered that for many moms it was a stress reliever. To some it was educational and to others it was a way to get away from their kids.

All of the women talked about how interesting it was, how much they enjoyed the books and how much fun it was. Also, the women talked about how proud they were to be a part of the graduation ceremony.

Once again, thank you for choosing Sojourner House for your program. We are looking forward to participating again next year.

Sincerely,

Jo Ann English

Jo Ann English
Child Development Specialist

cc

Ministering to Homeless Addicted Women & Their Children

...y of the official registration and financial information of this non-profit corporation may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within P... ...0)732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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